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HOLY GROUND

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HOLY GROUND

SERMONS PREACHED IN
TIME OF WAR

BY

J. ARMITAGE ROBINSON, D.D.

DEAN OF WELLS

68134

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON
1914

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PREFACE

In the dark days of January, 1900, I printed three sermons preached in Westminster Abbey on the subject of the war in South Africa. I have now been urged to republish these sermons. One of them, entitled 'Holy Ground,' has in substance been preached again on the second Sunday of this eventful August, and I give it here in the new form. The two others are reprinted without change, as the references to the original occasion are but few. I have added a sermon preached last Sunday week before the University of Cambridge.

My hope in putting out this little book is twofold. I trust that it may help my brothers of the clergy, who will have to treat the grave subject of the war again

and again, and will find it increasingly difficult to handle when the first and obvious things have been said. I trust also that the sermon entitled 'The Consolation of the Bereaved' may bring a message of Christian comfort into stricken homes.

Looking back over the interval of fourteen years, I seem to think that it was much easier to preach then than now. The issues were not so tremendous. The area of conflict was circumscribed: it was a national problem that we had to deal with. But it is a world problem that appals us to-day. It was possible then to rejoice in the thought that within the British Empire a family of nations, united and free, was beginning to offer a new type in the progressive development of mankind. But what is feasible to us does not seem to be attainable by the great continental powers, who are hampered and confined by our very success. They grow, and they cannot expand. The result is inevitable war. We have striven by diplo-

macy to keep the general peace by rendering war too risky for our principal rival. But the risk has been faced, quite madly as we think : and the chief part of Christendom, irrespective of its religious subdivisions, is at war within itself. The Name of God is invoked on either side, and the most scientific weapons of destruction are reddening Europe with a carnage to which the battles of the past have no parallel to offer.

As the world grows older and more civilised, war becomes worse. What is the way of escape ? Or must we despair of 'peace on earth' ? There are some of us who look to democracy to save the world from war. Are they not forgetting that the problem of expansion is not to be solved by change of government ? Are they not also forgetting that a century ago Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, asserted to the full, sprang to arms and invented universal national service ; and that presently the wars of a democracy produced Napoleon ?

Does Christianity offer a hope where civilization fails? We are certain that it does. The last book of the Bible speaks in Hebrew metaphor of a tree of life: 'and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.' It is small comfort to be told that the Sermon on the Mount applies to individuals, but was never intended to apply to the corporate life of a people. Even if this be true at a certain stage of the world's development, are we not meant to get beyond that stage?

We must recognize that Christ is at war with human selfishness, whether individual or corporate: that violence, whether individual or corporate, is not in the end to prove stronger than love: that unmerited suffering, voluntarily undergone, is the way of redemption: that in sacrifice lies the secret of life. Just in so far as sacrifice is manifested in individuals and in the nation will this war offer us a ray of hope. This, thank God, we shall see, and we shall take courage. A reasoned solution of the problem may be unattainable. But

faith claims the province which reason fails as yet to occupy. And every sign of sacrifice shall point us afresh to Christ upon the Cross, the eternal fact of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, the Lamb of God that taketh away the Sin of the World.

31*st August*, 1914.

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Sit dominus deus noster nobiscum :
Sicut fuit cum patribus nostris.

I

HOLY GROUND

'Loose thy shoe from off thy foot: for the place whereon thou standest is holy.' JOSHUA v. 15.

A CALL from God has come to our Nation in the week that is just past. After sincere and persistent efforts to maintain the peace of Europe, we have been forced sorely against our will into war, in order that we may fulfil our public obligations and, in particular, defend a small and courageous people against the outrageous attack of a gigantic enemy. Of the righteousness of our cause, as of the inevitableness of our action, none of us, I believe, has a single doubt. Of that I need say no more. My desire this morning is to offer some counsels as to the spirit in

which Christian men should fulfil their responsibility in regard to the war which is being carried on in their name.

The subject is a difficult one. It is not easy to lift the whole matter into the spiritual region, and to regard it in the light of Christian responsibility and in the light of the eternal Purpose of God for mankind. And yet if we would be true to our faith in Christ we must seek so to regard it. We who sit here at home are hurrying into eternity by a violent death hundreds, nay thousands, of our brave sons and of their brave foes. This alone should give us pause. Besides, we are passing through a crisis in the history of our nation which we cannot in the least measure at the moment. These things are a call to a religious seriousness: 'Loose thy shoe from off thy foot: for the place whereon thou standest is holy.'

The ground on which Joshua stood was no sacred place in the ordinary meaning of the term. It was the ground over which he was to pass to his first battle. It would

seem that he had gone out by himself to examine it beforehand. 'And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked; and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay: but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come.' He was a divine messenger to assure him that the conflicts of the visible world are being fought out in the invisible world. 'And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant? And the captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot: for the place whereon thou standest is holy.' The divine guidance is given only to reverence and awe. We mark our battle-fields with a cross after the event. We need to recognize beforehand the holiness of the ground on which human forces are to contend.

In order that we may pierce beneath the outward show of things, I would ask you to analyse the effect upon a man of some strength and goodness of being entrusted with a new and difficult and responsible task.

On the one hand, the new claim draws out whatever is strongest and bravest in him : it equips him with the moral weapons of hopefulness and determination, it reveals unsuspected resources of power, it calls into play faculties which had been trained without his being aware of them : he is more and greater than he knew.

On the other hand, he recognizes more than before his limitations : he sees the necessity for correcting many shortcomings and developing capacities for which hitherto he had no employment ; he is struck with remorse for neglected opportunities, he is moved to regret the carelessness of his self-discipline, he feels with sadness how much more he could do now, if only he were a better man : in a word, he is humbled.

These two things, the consciousness of strength and the sense of humility, are not inconsistent: they are evoked together by a new call of responsibility.

To the religious man, who has learned something of the hallowing of life, the acceptance and fulfilment of such a responsibility will influence the intercourse of his soul with God in two directions.

The opportunity of high service is in itself a subject of thankfulness to God: to be called to difficulty and strenuous exertion is honour and privilege. Moreover, the consciousness of power issues for a true man not in foolish pride, but in gratitude and a desire for fuller consecration.

But, again, the remembrance of past failures, the feeling of unworthiness, the sense of insufficiency for the task, combine to produce penitence, lowliness of spirit, and dependence upon God. The very thought that God deigns to use us after all, that the call comes from God and is a pledge of God's presence and assistance,

deepens these feelings. And the first difficulties which check us do not stagger us, but sober us, and make us yet more penitent, more lowly, and more dependent upon God.

The joint result of these mingled feelings is the prostration of our souls before God, first to thank Him for calling us to His service and endowing us with powers to serve Him; and then to humble ourselves before Him on account of those sins which 'sorely let and hinder us in running the way of His commandments'; and then to implore His continual help to further our endeavours and grant us good success. We have heard, as we went forth to survey the work that lay before us, the Voice that says, 'Loose thy shoe from off thy foot: for the place whereon thou standest is holy.'

This, surely, is the spirit in which any Christian man must meet new responsibility of an arduous kind: and it is thus that he must comport himself, as he learns to appreciate his task, and finds perhaps

that it is more trying and more costly than he had supposed.

Nor can I see any reason why it should be otherwise with the larger Man, which is the summing up of a Christian nation.

Our nation through a unique development has reached a position of prosperity, power and prestige, which has no parallel in history.

The empires of the past were empires of force and oppression. Some of them, it is true, wrought solid improvement for their subject populations. The Roman empire in especial gave good laws and sometimes good administration of justice to its provinces; it opened up highways of commerce, and, apart from frontier warfares, it compelled the world to be at peace. But the centre was fattened by nourishment which it drew from the whole area with ruthless selfishness: the old Roman virtue died, the heart of the empire rotted with corruption and immoralities; its defence was more and more entrusted to mercenary troops; new populations in

the north were feeling their power; and from causes internal and external the empire crumbled and fell.

The Napoleonic empire was the creation of the genius of a single man: it was a wholly unnatural combination, built up on mere military force, and outraging the newly awakened instincts of liberty which were characteristic of the age. It fell as suddenly as it rose, because the banner of liberty was lifted against it.

But that which—for lack of a better word—we call our Empire to-day is a wholly new thing in the world. The motherland has planted out her daughter states in vast countries beyond the seas. She has learned by one fearful loss that she cannot hold them in leading-strings, but can only rule them by trusting to their filial instinct, and by offering them continually the protection and the guidance and the unity which are the blessings of a family life. She has dowered them with that which she herself counts most dear, with that which she has gained and pre-

served at the greatest cost—with liberty. So she stands a proud mother of nations, which are bound to her by the bonds of reverence and love. Never before has she been so strong, never so glorious, never so free, never so prosperous.

There has now come on the motherland and the daughter states in their several measures a grave responsibility—to uphold the liberty of others, to champion the cause of international good faith, and to oppose the inroad of unrighteous forces. At once the sense of common anxiety has drawn together parties in the state and classes in society. We have learned once more that we are one. The task has drawn out our strength and courage: it has revealed unsuspected resources of power; it has given us a fresh sense of responsible mission. It has come home to us that such an Empire as God has given to us is attended with the most costly obligations, and involves personal sacrifices if it is to be maintained at all.

Thank God, with us it is the People

which rules, and the People which makes the sacrifices. We are one in power, one in sacrifice. It is not, as once it was, kings claiming new crowns to satisfy dynastic ambitions, and sacrificing their peoples to their projects of aggrandisement. It is the People making war, because it feels it must, unless it would be untrue to itself. And the People which has been too light-hearted in its boast of imperial greatness is now being sobered and quieted, and, in the true sense, humbled by realizing the magnitude of its responsibility and the costliness of fulfilling its mission.

And how should all this affect the People in its relation to God ?

The renewed consciousness of strength and of mission is a subject for national thankfulness. God has entrusted us with a high responsibility. He has indeed pushed us forward to the forefront of His Purpose. For this we thank God. We thank Him that He has made us here the centre of so vast a work for humanity.

But let us see to it that we humble ourselves before Him who is willing thus to make us the instruments of His Purpose. He is calling us by the providence of events to take a lowlier estimate, not of our task, but of ourselves, that we may be the fitter for His high service.

It is not craven fear which will be sending us to our prayers in the days that are before us. Our motives in the main will be two: (1) a desire for corporate prayer for our nation, that it may have God's help in fulfilling its responsibility, both now and when, at the close of the war, we have to shew why we waged it by our action after it; and (2) sympathy with the sufferings of individuals, and a longing to pray for the wounded and the dying—wounded and dying for us—and for the bereaved, who will have made so great sacrifices for our sakes.

Such will be our prayers; and to them must we add not only our thanksgivings for God's great goodness to us as a People, but our confession of our many common

sins. Thankful and humbled, we loose the shoe from off our foot, because the ground on which we stand at this crisis is holy ground; and we wait in hushed silence to learn what the Lord our God would say to us.

The ground on which Joshua stood was not 'holy ground' until he had found God there. It was even so with Jacob in the wilderness. In a wild and fearsome spot, a place of devils rather than of good spirits, he saw a ladder leading from earth to heaven, and he was constrained to say, 'Surely the Lord is in this place and I knew it not.' And he called it ever afterwards Bethel, 'the house of God.'

Brethren, may a like experience be yours to-day. To some of you it may seem that the field of war is only inhuman and ungodly, the playground of devils sporting with the lives of men. In the lull before the battle Joshua was taught a very different lesson. The scene of to-morrow's carnage is to the man whose eyes are opened, who has seen the vision

of the Almighty, a meeting-place between God and man. 'Loose thy shoe from off thy foot: for the place whereon thou standest is holy.'

II

THE HOPE OF A NATION

'The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.' DEUT. xxxiii. 27.

THESE are among the last words of the parting blessing of Moses. Before the aged statesman-prophet, who has led the people through the wilderness to the very borders of the promised land, climbs the hill where (as the old tradition says) he died of the kiss of God, he sums up his experience of the past and declares his hope for the future.

The words were spoken, as all the greatest utterances of the Old Testament were spoken, to a people.

'There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in

thy help, and in His excellency on the sky. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and He shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them. Israel then shall dwell in safety alone: the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine: also his heavens shall drop down dew. Happy art thou, O Israel! who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places.'

It was a people's promise, and a people's hope. The hope of an individual immortality was not revealed in the earlier stages of the Jewish religion. It was to be enough for the individual that he should serve his generation, and sleep with his fathers. He had no promise of an awakening. In some of the later Psalms, and in the books of the Apocrypha, the hope of personal life after death begins

to dawn: but it was left for Christianity to proclaim this as a fundamental truth of religion. It was Christ who 'brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.'

The hope of the Israelite was a national hope. His fathers had known God, and done their work, and passed to their rest. He in his turn was allowed to know God, and do his share of work, and be buried with his fathers; leaving children and children's children to carry the work still further forward, till at last it reached its glorious consummation. The Nation lived on and expanded and developed; blessed when it feared the Lord, punished when it forgot Him. Thousands and tens of thousands of its sons and daughters passed, but the Nation still lived on, and learned to look for its perfect glory in the future, when the King Messiah should reign in righteousness over the whole earth, sitting on David's throne in Jerusalem.

This was the ideal of the great poets and prophets of the Jewish people. It

was a national, and not an individual hope.

It is nowhere more magnificently expressed than in the ninetieth Psalm. 'Lord, Thou hast been our refuge from one generation to another.' The individual is like the grass; 'in the morning it is green and groweth up; but in the evening it is cut down, dried up, and withered.' The span of life is threescore years and ten, or possibly fourscore. But God remains, and the people of God remains. And the final and all-satisfying hope of the individual is that he may wisely spend his days, and faithfully do his task, and that the future may see the completed result. 'Shew Thy servants Thy work: and their children Thy glory.'

Think, for one moment, of this vast church, built by successive generations, rising to overshadow the graves of hundreds of its builders. Look at that solitary workman, swung in mid-air, chiselling some unseen, unnoticed ornament. What

is the extent, or the value, of his individual work? Can he hope to see the great design carried to completion in his life-time? No! he must work while it is day for him, and then lie down to sleep the great sleep when his night-time comes. But others—his children or his grandchildren—will see the full glory of the finished temple. And so every stroke of his patient chisel is in itself a prayer that his tiny part may be not unworthy of the glorious whole; that the work of the present may help to make up the majesty of the future:

> 'Show Thy servants Thy work,
> And their children Thy glory.'

That ninetieth Psalm is called 'A prayer of Moses, the man of God.' Whatever may be the value of the tradition, we may at least trace the harmony of its thought with the Blessing from which we take our text. Israel is in the hands of God: 'The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.' The continuity of national life is a perpetual

inspiration. He, watching over Israel, guides its destinies: from generation to generation it finds its refuge in Him. Its leaders pass, its meaner folk pass too: but the people remains in the very bosom of the Eternal: 'underneath it are the everlasting arms.'

Is the eternal God the refuge of nations to-day? Or was the Jewish dispensation a temporary phase with no permanent lesson for the world?

If we study the history of revelation, we shall find that it has connected itself with the expanding life of a people. God reveals Himself to a man—to a family—to a nation. And to each in turn the promise is made: 'In thee and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.'

Christianity does not reject the method, though it enlarges the scope of God's dealing. It introduces a wider conception, and presents a cosmopolitan ideal.

It might have seemed, on the arrival of Christianity, that national life was a thing

of the past. For Christianity came into the world under the Roman empire: and the universalism of Rome was the foe of nationalism. But presently Rome broke up. The false unity gave a witness that some day there should be a true unity, and then fell to pieces to shew that it was not that true unity itself.

The nations awoke, and have been slowly developing themselves. And we have been taught that just as the true nation does not suppress the family, so the true human unity does not suppress either the family or the nation, but promises both in their fullest realization.

God is not indeed the God of a single nation as against the rest: just as He is not the God of a single family as against others. But He is the God of nations, and the Judge among the nations. Every true nation, that believes in God and does righteousness, can claim the promise of these words, as much as the Jewish nation could: 'The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.'

There are times when a nation becomes for a while vividly conscious of its corporate life. These times are not the dangerous 'hours of wealth,' but the more blessed, because the more uniting, moments of common anxiety and trouble. Then it is that a silence is made in which you almost hear the pulsings of that mighty heart: then the great and small alike forget their miserable individuality, and rise to remember that they are parts of a whole.

A young lad said to me two nights ago, fixing his deep earnest gaze upon me for some time before he spoke, 'You will pray for the soldiers, won't you?' And when I asked him whether he had any friend in the campaign, he said, 'No—but it does seem so terrible.'

More than the speeches of all the politicians that simple incident told me that we were *one*. In reckoning up what spiritual gains we may set against the evils and losses of war, we shall do well to lay stress on its proved power to unite

the Nation as a single man in presence of a common trouble.

This unity is God's highest gift to a people. The renewed sense of it is a promise that He has not forsaken us.

We believe that God is not our God alone, but the one God who has made 'all nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation, that they should seek the Lord.' But this large faith shall not prevent us from invoking the God of our fathers, whose hand we trace in all our national history; from committing our cause to Him, in repentance and humility, but yet in strong confidence. For all the pride and selfishness that mingles with our motive, for all in detail that may have been wrong in the method of our policy—and for the most part it is too soon for human judgment to pronounce on that—we know that He will punish us. But we believe that our cause is bound up with liberty and human progress; and we call

upon God to prosper our effort to maintain it. 'The Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers.' The Lord our God unite us, and keep us united. The Lord our God forgive us, and purify us, and lead us in the paths of righteousness, for His Name's sake. So, though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, for ourselves and for our brothers we will fear no evil: 'The eternal God is our refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.'

If the national reference of these words be their primary reference, yet we are justified in giving them a further and more personal reference in the light of the Christian revelation.

Few things can be more affecting to a Christian soul than the thought of the hundreds of lives, both on our own and on the opposing side, which are suddenly cut short in the fulness of physical vigour—lives that might have had so much before them, that might have done such great work in the world.

'They who marched up the bluffs last stormy week:
Some of them, ere they reached the mountain's crown,
The wind of battle breathing on their cheek,
Suddenly laid them down.'

What is the meaning of this in the light of eternity? Must we content ourselves now with saying: Thou hast shewn Thy servants Thy work; shew their children Thy glory?

Or may we not say

'That not one life shall be destroyed,
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete?'

May we not say that our brothers who have given their lives for us have lost them only to find them: that they live on in a waiting interval, in a world whither we too are tending, and where 'they without us shall not be made perfect'? May we not say of them in the fullest and most personal sense: 'The eternal God is their refuge, and underneath them are the everlasting arms'?

I believe from my soul that we may.

Into the reasons of this belief it would be impossible to enter now. Two Sundays hence we shall ask your contributions towards the families of those brave men who have given themselves on our behalf; and then, if God will, we may come back to these questions again, and try to find a fuller answer to them.

Meanwhile, let us pray that God will comfort all stricken homes, alike in our own and in other lands. May He 'have mercy on all the wounded, our own and of the enemy'; may He 'succour the dying, comfort the bereaved, cheer the anxious'; may He 'uphold the faith of His servants'—for indeed it is sometimes sorely tried—and may He 'give peace and lasting concord.' This shall be our daily prayer.

And as the days go on, let us strive more and more to live worthily of our high calling as a Christian people. Let us believe more in one another, let us believe more in our Nation, let us believe more in our God. Let us cherish the

sense of national mission. It was John Milton who said two centuries and a half ago that when God has some hard work to be done for the world, He calls on 'His Englishmen' to do it. Our fathers have proved the truth of this again and again. Let us not fail to bear the burden that they have transferred to our shoulders.

We shall not be the better Christians for being halting and half-hearted patriots. We have a divinely-appointed task: let us not shirk it. Let us purge our imperialism from the dross of self-seeking and vain-glory. But let us rise and answer to our call, and the God of Israel will be our God to-day. 'Happy art thou, O Israel; who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord?' 'The eternal God is thy refuge: and underneath are the everlasting arms.'

III

THE CONSOLATION OF THE BEREAVED

'The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.' DEUT. xxxiii. 27.

Two Sundays ago we considered the hope offered by these words to a Nation, the promise of a perpetual shelter in the bosom of the Eternal. To-day, as we endeavour to relieve, so far as our gifts may enable us to do so, some of the sufferings incidental to the present war, we are to consider what consolations may be offered to individual mourners.

We begin by thinking of broken home circles. The lives lost—and we must add to them the lives permanently shattered, of which the wrecks alone will reach our

shore—mean much of loss to the Nation; but how much more of loss to separate families? All these lives are strong and vigorous lives; most of them are young lives. Again and again it must inevitably be that the brightest promise, the noblest strength, the highest helpfulness is suddenly snatched from the home: the lamp is quenched, the pillar of the house is fallen.

We are asked to offer our contributions to lessen in some degree the poverty and destruction which thereby falls on poorer households, which have been robbed of the mainstay of their material fortunes: but we must not forget that the loss is not measurable by a material standard.

By a strange and stern law of compensation, which equalizes the distribution of pain, where the material loss is the less felt the heart's loss is often the greater. No hunger, no cold, no nakedness, enters this house by reason of the new record in the registry of death. Externally, materi-

ally, all is as before. But there is the more room and scope for the agony of bereavement: there is the less possibility of assuagement by the good offices of others. Gifts can do nothing here to help: and words, we know, are often crueller than silence. The stranger cannot intermeddle: no anxious effort we can make can mitigate the bitterness.

What consolations can we offer that will nerve the hearts of rich as well as poor to bear the burden which we have imposed upon them?

1. First, there springs to our lips the great key-word that more than any other interprets the mystery of our human life—the word SACRIFICE.

What a lesson may be taught on the battle-field itself, to the man who has seen his comrade fall by his side, has been told us by our poet-primate of Armagh.[1] He has told us how such a man has entered into fellowship with the other world, and held communion with the dead.

[1] The late Archbishop Alexander.

'And thoughts beyond his thoughts the Spirit lent,
And manly tears made mist upon his eyes;
And to him came a great presentiment
Of high self-sacrifice.'

But it is not only those who lay down their lives for us on the field of battle that have made sacrifice for the country's cause.

Look at that mother who kisses her boy for the last time, and commends him to God. Who shall measure in words what she is giving away? She weeps, but she does not withhold him. She does not say Stay, but Go. She gives him—gives a large part, perhaps the largest now, of her own life. He is her sacrifice.

And when the sad telegram comes, she weeps—but she does not repent. It was a sacrifice: she offered it, and it has been accepted. She cries indeed, 'Would God I had died for thee, my son, my son!' But, when the first agony is past, there comes, and comes to abide, the noble pride of a true sacrifice. She would not ask it back again. It is better so. It is a gift, not a mere loss.

May I read to you some words, written at the time of the Crimean War by John Ruskin, and worthy to be recalled to-day? He is declaring his belief that, in spite of all its mistakes and its cost, that war was productive of good more than of evil.[1]

'I will appeal at once,' he says, 'to the testimony of those whom the war has cost the dearest . . . . I ask *their* witness, to whom the war has changed the aspect of the earth, and imagery of heaven, whose hopes it has cut off like a spider's web, whose treasure it has placed, in a moment, under the seals of clay. Those who can never more see sunrise, nor watch the climbing light gild the Eastern clouds, without thinking what graves it has gilded, first, far down behind the dark earth-line, —who never more shall see the crocus bloom in spring, without thinking what dust it is that feeds the wild flowers of Balaclava. Ask *their* witness, and see if they will not reply that it is well with them and theirs; that they would have

[1] *Modern Painters*, pt. iv., ch. 18, § 33.

it no otherwise; would not, if they might, receive back their gifts of love and life, nor take again the purple of their blood out of the cross on the breastplate of England.'

The lapse of years has not changed the heart of the English folk. This spirit prevails, and will prevail, in hundreds of our homes. Its nobility is its own reward: it finds a joy in having been allowed to give.

2. A true consolation, even if this were all: if death closed the story; if there were no hereafter; if there were no recognitions and restorations in another world.

If this were all: if the gift sacrificed were thereafter a wholly vanished thing: if it were nowhere stored in the hidden treasuries of the Eternal and Divine. For sacrifice knows not how to reckon: it cannot barter: it 'rejects the lore of nicely calculated less or more.' Of such noble stuff are human hearts made, that sacrifice of itself brings joy—incalculable, unearthly, indestructible. But this is not

all. We know that it is not all. We know that we cannot die with death. And so there comes to us another word of consolation—another key-word that helps to unlock the mysteries of life. It is the word RESURRECTION.

I say that we *know* that we shall not wholly die with physical death. It is true that we cannot prove it. Many things point that way. Many things shew us that it is most reasonable. Many things clear themselves when we accept that as the truth. But we cannot prove it. At least, I cannot. Indeed, I cannot even conceive of any form of proof by which it could be proved. If you demand a proof, then I ask you to tell me what kind of proof would convince you: for I know not where to begin.

Most of us will never believe that the so-called manifestations of the spirit-world are anything more than the reflection of the ideas of those who think they receive these manifestations. We find no proof there. Nor, if a friend of our own returned

from the grave to assure us, should we believe for that: we should certainly still doubt, when he was gone, whether we had not been victims of an illusion.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the nearest thing to a logical proof that we can conceive of. Not the mere fact, attested strongly as it is by the best kinds of historical evidence; but the fact in its setting, so to speak: the fitness of the fact as the climax of such a Life and of such a Death.

This much of proof indeed we have, and it helps to confirm our conviction. But we *know* without proof. There is something in us that is eternal, that goes out beyond the momentary and the fleeting, and that refuses to be satisfied with anything less than the eternal God.

We are certain that our short life on earth is not all: it is a stage in a larger process. Life is a school. It is not a prison: nor a play-ground: it is a school, and we are being educated for a purpose. When our school-days end, life in a sense

begins; so death, which ends this life, ushers us into another and a larger life.

Put it as you will, we have the indestructible conviction that we shall live on after death: and this conviction is allied to all in life that ennobles and uplifts: it is sanctioned and proclaimed as truth by Christ. He has 'brought life and immortality to light by the Gospel.'

Here then a fresh light springs up in the darkness of bereavement—a promise that nothing of worth is really lost—a promise of restitution—a hope full of immortality.

'For a while the tirèd body
Lies with feet toward the morn;
Till the last and brightest Easter
Day be born.

. . . . . .

'On that happy Easter morning
All the graves their dead restore;
Father, sister, child, and mother,
Meet once more.'

Some one will say: your Christian doctrine brings a vast comfort to those who

have ground for confidence that their dear departed were among the number of those earnest souls who had set their Master always before their eyes, who had trusted in Him and followed Him, and now sleep in Him. But if it opens a door of hope, does it not open a wider door over which is written the legend of despair? Can you shut your eyes to the fact that many, very many, of our eager and brave young soldiers have lived lives which cannot be counted religious—that perhaps the majority had thought but little of the future, and were wholly unprepared for death? Would it not be more merciful to keep silence altogether, than to mention that life after death, which, if it offers consolation to a few, suggests the most grievous anxiety to the many? For what is most terrible in war? Not the blood and wounds, not the torture of crushed limbs and the maddening thirst—not these, but the plunging of unprepared souls into eternity.

Brethren, in face of this question I dare

solemnly to repeat the words of our text: 'The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.'

Let us ask ourselves for a moment what at all we can know of this mysterious life after death? What does it mean to have crossed the narrow stream and to have stepped out on the other side? Some things I am sure it does not mean:

(*a*) It does not mean a wholly new beginning. The man is what he was: what his life has made him to be. There is no break in his character. His conditions have changed, but he is the same. All he has been and all he has done is with him now.

> 'I looked behind to find my past,
> And, lo, it had gone before.'

(*b*) Nor again does it mean an absolute fixity. It is true that the moment after death I shall be just what I was the moment before death: but it is not therefore true that I shall continue to be that for all the future. Progress, movement, development—these are implied when we

speak of life, whether in this world or another. I cannot believe the theory—for it is but a theory—that the moment of physical death is the moment in which a man's state is eternally and unalterably fixed. I cannot find that in my Bible: all nature, all analogy, is against it. It cannot be.

What then does death bring with it? I would venture to reply, a change of sphere: and I mean especially that direct contact with the eternal and the real of which most of us know so little now.

Here we are surrounded with material shrouds and veils, which come between us and the realities which are about us. There are moments in which we recognize these realities, and then all else seems nothing in comparison. But these moments pass, and we forget or ignore or deny their existence again.

Death will bring us face to face with things as they are. All veils and covers will be torn away, all falsehoods and shams will disappear. The soul, stripped and

bare, will find itself in a region of absolute reality, in eternity, in 'the hands of the living God.' That is what death will bring.

To some of us it will not be wholly a surprise. For after all, we are even now 'in His hands.' It is the one firm conviction of our lives that at this moment the eternal God *is* our refuge, and that underneath us are the everlasting arms. In moments of spiritual weariness, tired in the upward struggle, exhausted by failure, and longing to be delivered from ourselves, we lean back and feel the pressure of those 'everlasting arms' as they close around us: and their touch is life-giving, and we are strong again. And to find ourselves at death in these same arms will be no new thing, but the very consummation of our highest experiences on earth.

To others of us it will be a surprise, an awful revelation. We have never perhaps realized the nearness of God. 'Thou art about my path and about my bed, and

spiest out all my ways. There is not a word in my tongue, but Thou, O Lord, knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and hast laid Thine hand upon me.' That is so now: but we are forgetting it: we are not realizing it. And then suddenly, in an instant, we shall find it to be altogether true. We shall drop as it seems into the darkness: but the darkness is no darkness with Him. We shall find that we have fallen 'into the hands of the living God.'

To some, I say, it will not be altogether unfamiliar; to others it will be a startling surprise. But to *all* it must be the very best thing possible. It must be good to find ourselves in His hands. There is none who loves us as He loves us. It must be good—nay, the very best—to come right into the presence of God: to find ourselves there with no cover and no escape. It is a fearful thing indeed. Only one thing could be more fearful: that is, if it were possible to pass into some world where He was *not*; into some universe

which God did not guide and govern, where He had abdicated His control: to fall *out of* the hands of the living God. That would be death indeed—utter, irremediable despair.

'I know not where His islands lift
Their fronded palms in air;
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond His love and care.'

I say these things, not because I think lightly of the importance of this present time of life as a preparation for the future: not, God knows, because I think lightly of the sinfulness of sin, and of the certainty of its punishment, and of the danger of a hardened will that persistently refuses, and may refuse even after death, to submit to the will of God.

No, but I say them because the false theory of the fixity of a man's state after death has wrought misery and despair in the tender souls of those who have been left behind, and have not dared to cherish a hope. I say them on the chance of lifting from one bereaved heart a burden

which it need not bear. If our poor human love can follow those who have passed out of our sight, how much more can the great love of God follow and overtake and compass round the souls which He has made?

These two thoughts then I leave with you—*Sacrifice* and *Resurrection*. Is it not significant that the religion, which has proclaimed the divineness of Sacrifice, is the religion which has declared to us the Resurrection: that it is the Faith of the Cross which has for ever rolled back the stone that closed the tomb? The Christ of the supreme Sacrifice is the Christ of the certain Resurrection.

IV

A NATION'S PRAYER

'The Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers.' 1 KINGS viii. 57.

IT was a great occasion that called forth this prayer. It was the dedication of Solomon's Temple, the outward sign of Israel's unity and of God's dwelling among them. The remembrance of the goodness of God to Israel swept over the souls of the great multitude. The sense of sinfulness humbled them and turned them to prayer. Let not their sin, but His mercy, have the upper hand. Let there be a door of penitence left ajar; let forgiveness restore; let the divine Presence never be wholly taken from them. All this was said, and the king rose and turned to the

people, and blessed them, and summed up in his blessing the elements of thankfulness and humble fear. 'And it was so, that when Solomon had made an end of praying all this prayer and supplication unto the Lord, he arose from before the altar of the Lord, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread up to heaven. And he stood and blessed all the congregation of Israel with a loud voice, saying, Blessed be the Lord, that hath given rest unto His people Israel, according to all that He promised: there hath not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised by the hand of Moses His servant. The Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers: let Him not leave us, nor forsake us: that He may incline our hearts unto Him, to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments, and His statutes, and His judgements, which He commanded our fathers. And let these my words, wherewith I have made supplication before the Lord, be nigh unto the Lord our God day and night, that

He maintain the cause of His servant, and the cause of His people Israel at all times, as the matter shall require: that all the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God, and that there is none else.'

The comment of history on this scene is a perpetual warning to every nation. The heart of king and people turned aside: the unexampled glory tarnished by transgression: the religious unity broken by dissensions: the kingdom rent in twain at the great king's death: the horrors of devastating warfare, and the long misery of captivity. For they had forgotten that their prayer pledged them to a faithfulness which should correspond to and co-operate with the faithfulness of God. They had forgotten the words of one of their prophets: 'The Lord will be with you, if ye will be with Him: if ye forsake Him, He will forsake you.' Yet it was a great and a sincere prayer as it was offered on that day, and it was never wholly left without an answer: 'The Lord

our God be with us, as He was with our fathers.'

Gathered as we are here before God at this solemn moment of the world's history, these words may fitly express our aspirations whether as individuals or as a nation. I ask you to think of them first in relation to your own selves.

1. 'The Lord our God be with us.' Aye, for we cannot do without Him. Some of us perhaps have been trying to do without Him: not consciously, it may be; not deliberately turning our backs and walking the other way: but letting Him slip out of our lives. And He has slipped out, and has withdrawn Himself very far, into His own unapproachable distance: and we have said that we could not see Him as we once did; and we have questioned our former knowledge of Him and found it very dim and uncertain after all; and we doubt if we ever knew Him with more than a fancied knowledge. And we have almost ceased from praying. We have got out of touch with the spiritual world:

we half question whether there be a spiritual world to be in touch with. The heart's weakness has begun to affect the vision: for there is a sad converse to the promise that the pure in heart shall see God. And our misty sight produces in its turn a further slackening of our moral effort. We seem to care less whether there be a God to be with us, or no.

And yet—one thing we have not gained by our dismissal of the thought of God: we have not gained content, we are not satisfied. *Fecisti nos ad te*: Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our heart is restless till it rest in Thee. And gladly, if so it might be, when the unspeakable burden of the present hour of darkness is upon our spirits—gladly would we find a good excuse to pray, 'The Lord our God be with us'—be with us after all, and in spite of all, nay, because of all.

And the encouragement we need comes to us in our text. 'He was with our fathers.' That somehow remains. We cannot trust our own past experiences.

But the God of our fathers was at least a great reality to them. They trusted in Him, and were not ashamed.

If your own family history does not help you here, then you must fight your battle without the greatest of all aids to faith. But you can still look afield, and see what God has ever been to His saints. The lives of good men are written for your learning, and that you might have hope. The passionate devotion of a St. Paul, the splendid love of a St. Francis, the pure heroism of a Gordon—all these best things in humanity were founded on the knowledge of God in Christ. You can read your Tennyson, and see how one great mind faced in the *In Memoriam* the dark doubts raised by modern investigation of nature, and yet clung to God and to prayer; and at last could even contemplate the coming carnage of almost universal war, and call it the Red of the Dawn.

These things renew our faith as we recall them: they hearten us, if we will

let them: they help us out of our own personal weakness and diffidence to utter the cry: 'The Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers.'

2. But if all this be true of individuals, how much more is it true of a great people? For after all the national purport of these words is their original significance. They were the prayer of a great king for his people, at a crisis of their national life: 'The Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers.'

We have been moving in a kind of steady triumphal march through the century that is past. We have stood for liberty of thought and speech and action against all kinds of tyranny. Our fathers trusted in God, and He helped them. 'He was with our fathers.' He was with them at Trafalgar and at Waterloo, when they saved not England only, but Europe, from the overwhelming might of the oppressor. It is well that we should recall Nelson's last prayer. His great call signalled to the fleet still challenges us

to-day. His silent, solitary prayer is thus recorded in Southey's *Life of Nelson*: 'Having seen that all was as it should be, Nelson retired to his cabin, and wrote this prayer:

"May the great God whom I worship grant to my country, and for the benefit of Europe in general, a great and glorious victory; and may no misconduct in any one tarnish it; and may humanity after victory be the predominant feature in the British Fleet. For myself individually I commit my life to Him that made me, and may His blessing alight on my endeavours for serving my country faithfully. To Him I resign myself, and the just cause which is entrusted to me to defend. Amen, Amen, Amen."'

And if this were so of Nelson, did not the Iron Duke too trust in God and do his duty? Truly God was with our fathers. He was with them when storm after storm swept over the European states, and left us still unshaken, purged by reform, not shattered by revolution:

'A land of settled government,
A land of just and old renown,
Where Freedom slowly broadens down
From precedent to precedent.'

Aye, and He was with our fathers in those awful days which some here perchance can remember; when, in the classic words of our statesman-orator, 'the angel of Death was abroad in the land, and you could almost hear the beating of his wings': when our soldiers were dying like flies in the Crimea, and again when the Indian Mutiny seemed to shake the foundations of our Empire. Through it all and out of it all in the name of God we came stronger than before.

'He was with our fathers' in more recent times, within the memory of us all, when a check to our arms in South Africa revealed to us that we had a worthier foe to fight than we had fancied, and that we needed to confess our sins and humble ourselves before God and ask His help; and then once more the Lord our God, as we believed,

was with us, as He had been with our fathers.

The Lord our God be with us in this war to see it calmly through, cost what it will: be with us at its close to mete out generous justice to our brave adversaries, without spite or revenge; and to establish the principles of international good faith and loyalty to compact, for which we are being forced to fight: be with us at home to defend the cause of the needy in our midst, and to purge our family life and our civic life from folly and greed and corruption. 'The Lord our God be with us.'

As we so pray, and rise above ourselves to seek the larger interests of the nation as a whole, we shall not find it harder, nay, we shall find it easier, more natural, more real, to pray for our own selves as well: 'The Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers.'

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